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ABSTRACT

A major avenue for dissemination of information among members of a profession is via the professional, scholarly literature published in the major journals within a field. If the role of the school psychologist is changing, this change should be reflected in the current literature. An earlier study traced the published issues and concerns appearing in the major school psychology journals from 1963-1973 and classified each article in one of 16 categories as determined by the major theme of the paper. Research articles appearing in five major journals from 1974-1980 were reviewed and placed in one of the 16 categories. A chi-square analysis was used to determine whether years differed in relative distribution of observations across the categories. Spearman's rho correlation coefficients were calculated for the rank order of categories between each pair of years allowing for comparison of the current data with previous data. Results indicated a significant change in content of articles published over the seven-year period. Articles concerning instrument development and validation accounted for the relatively largest percentage of total articles published in the 1974-1980 period and had continued to increase since the 1967-1973 period. The findings indicate that areas most closely related to psychological testing and referral as well as the proper role and practice of school psychology have increased and tend to dominate the school psychology literature. (Author/NRB)

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Research Trends in School Psychology: 1974-1980

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Paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Los Angeles, August, 1981.

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Research Trends in School Psychology: 1974-1980

A major avenue for dissemination of information among members of a profession is via the professional, scholarly literature published in the major journals within a field. It is assumed the report of current research within a discipline is an accurate reflection of the professional pulse. That is, the published research should reflect the current interests and concerns of its professional consumers.

School psychology as a profession developed primarily as a result of school systems' desires to provide a more precise and reliable means of classifying and identifying children for special education programs (Bardon, 1982). Thus, the traditional role assumed by the school psychologist has been that of a psychometrician or tester. From before the Thayer Conference in 1954 (Cutts, 1955) to the present day (Ysseldyke & Weinberg, 1981), school psychologists have sought to broaden and redefine their roles within educational as well as psychological communities. The desire is to branch out from the very restricted diagnostic role to a more broadly defined consultation role, though testing is considered by many to be a master skill of the school psychologist (e.g., Page, 1982). Meacham and Peckham (1978), in a national survey of school psychologists, found the consultant role to be the one most preferred by all levels of practicing school psychologists. Similar findings have shown that school personnel often prefer consultation rather than more traditional diagnostic assessment approaches (Gutkin, Singer,

& Brown, 1980 ; Lambert, Sandoval, & Corder, 1975, Manley & Manley, 1978). The role of the school psychologist as a change agent has also gained increasing interest (Bardon, 1982; Lambert, 1974; Meacham & Peckham, 1978).

O'Callaghan (1974) traced the published issues and concerns appearing in the major school psychology journals from 1963-1973. Her findings confirmed the diversification of interests and roles in school psychology. It is interesting to note, however, that articles concerning areas most typically associated with the traditional psychometric role of the school psychologist accounted for the largest percentage of articles published in the 1967 to 1973 time period.

If indeed the role of the school psychologist is changing, this change should be reflected in the current scholarly literature. The major purpose of this study was to determine whether diversification of interest as a trend has continued in the literature and to what extent these publications reflect the concern for a more broadly defined role for school psychologists.

Method

Materials

All articles were reviewed and classified from the following school psychology journals: Journal of School Psychology, 1974, Vol. 2 (1) - 1980, Vol. 8 (4); Psychology in the Schools, 1974, Vol. 11 (1) - 1980, Vol. 17 (4); School Psychology Digest/Review, 1974, Vol. 3 (1) - 1980, Vol. 9 (4). In addition, articles written specifically about school psychology were selected and reviewed

from Professional Psychology, 1974, Vol. 5 (1) - 1980, Vol. 11 (4) and American Psychologist, 1974, Vol. 29 (1) - 1980, Vol. 35 (12). It should be noted that School Psychology Digest underwent a name change, becoming the School Psychology Review in 1980. While originally composed of all invited articles and condensed reprints of previously published articles, School Psychology Review now contains invited as well as unsolicited, refereed works.

To facilitate comparisons with earlier years, the 16 category scheme for classification of articles by content developed and reported by O'Callaghan (1974) was used in the present study. O'Callaghan's 16 categories of studies include:

1. Practice
2. Professional preparation
3. Professional identity
4. Ethical and legal
5. Early education
6. Compensatory education
7. Instrument development and validation
8. Assessment and referral
9. Research issues
10. Current educational issues
11. Clinical-personality
12. Special education-Exceptional children
13. Classroom organization and management
14. Social-Educational psychology
15. Instructional issues
16. Higher mental processes.

A complete narrative description of each category and rules for article classification are available in O'Callaghan (1974).

Procedure

Each article published in the above named journals was reviewed and placed in one of O'Callaghan's 16 categories as determined by the principal theme or focus of the paper in question. Each article was assigned to one (and only one) classification. Any articles that were are clearly distinguishable into one of the 16 categories were assigned following review and discussion between the present authors. The vast majority of papers were easily distinguished, and O'Callaghan (1974) has reported this to be a reliable classification system.

The total number of articles published was determined in each category over the 7-year period, in each year across all categories, and within each category within each year. Based on the expected frequency in comparison to the observed frequency within each category, a chi-square analysis was used to determine whether years differed in relative distribution of observations across the 16 content categories.

To facilitate comparisons of the current results with those of O'Callaghan (1974) for the 1967-1973 time period (although, O'Callaghan offered no statistical analysis of her data beyond a simple descriptive presentation), the various categories were rank ordered within each year according to the percentage of the total number of articles published for the year falling in each category. Spearman's rho was then calculated for the rank order of categories between

every possible pair of years, though it should be noted that O'Callaghan collapsed across individual years into 3-year clusters. Examining the magnitude of the thus obtained correlations assists in determining whether any detected changes in research trends are gradual or more decidedly rapid and helps to locate a point of demarcation should one occur.

Results

Results of the survey are presented in Table 1. Shown are the number of articles published in each category, rank order, and

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Insert Table 1 about here

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percentage of total articles represented in each category. The chi-square test indicated a significant change in articles published over the 7-year period {$\chi^2(90)=215.84$, $p<.001$}. Rank orders of the categories and the percentages of articles published within each category show category 7, Instrument Development and Validation, consistently represents the most frequent area of publication for school psychologists; 6 of the past 7 years this has been the highest ranking category. The percentage of articles published in this area has also steadily, but slowly, increased over the past decade.

Correlations between rank orders of the categories for each pair of years reveals gradual changes in the distribution of types of articles published. Table 2 presents the matrix of correlations.

Insert Table 2 about here

If the correlations off the diagonal (which here represents pairs of adjacent years) were the same or larger than the diagonal correlations, a more rapid shifting in trends in research would be indicated. The average diagonal correlation is .70, while the off diagonal correlations average to .57 (all by Fisher's z transformation).

Discussion

O'Callaghan (1974) predicted that there would be a continuing trend toward diversification of interests in research in school psychology. With regard to research published in school psychology journals, our results indicate a slight narrowing of interests. The significant chi-square results indicate a change in the frequency of types of articles published over the period 1974-1980. Based on current surveys (e.g., Meacham & Peckham, 1978) one would expect there to be fewer articles dealing with topics commonly associated with the traditional assessment role of the school psychologist and more dealing with consultative functions, decision making, etc.

Closer inspection of the data does not, however, support this assumption. Those categories with the largest proportion of articles in the 1967-1973 period continued to increase in proportion of total articles accounted for. By far the largest percentage of articles published in 1975-1980 were classified in category 7, Instrument Development and Validation, and in category 8, Assessment and Referral. This is consistent with O'Callaghan's (1974) report that most published research in school psychology tended to fall into these categories. During the years 1978-1980 articles published

in the Practice category accounted for a relatively large percentage of articles published and a large proportion of these articles dealt with the more broadly defined roles for the school psychologist. There is an apparent discrepancy. Perhaps this discrepancy can be explained as Meacham and Peckham (1978) point out, the consultant must have something to consult about and test data are still and will be very important.

Perhaps the topics appearing in the professional literature will reflect the changing roles if, as Bardon (1982) suggests, "...perceptions of school psychologists move from that of testers of children with special needs to that of experts in the psycnology of children with special education needs" (p.14). In response to the comprehensive diversity of functioning for the school psychologist, Phillips (1982) maintains that research which has potential for school intervention should be given top priority. For him, intervention is the key to roles and functions of the school psychologist. Intervention may very well involve the use of formal and informal assessment instruments but the means for interpreting and applying the findings may be more beneficial to consumers of the literature.

There have been gradual changes in trends in the school psychology literature over the past 17 years but not as one might have expected. Areas most closely related to psychological testing and referral and related to debating the proper role and practice of school psychology have gradually increased and tend to now dominate the school psychology literature. Thus, while there is much rhetoric concerning movement of the school psychologist away from

the role of psychometrician or psychodiagnostician, researchers in school psychology continue to focus ever more heavily on these roles. If practice is to be based on data and other empirical evidence, as we believe it should be, then research should precede significant changes in practice. If trainers and researchers wish to alter the focus of psychological practice in the schools, perhaps they must first alter their own habits of research and apply themselves more directly to the more rapid development of the empirical bases for the desired changes and focus less, instead of more, on traditional psychometric aspects of practice.

We certainly do not contend that academic and other research oriented school psychologists publish only in the 5 journals reviewed here. A quick glance in such respected scholarly publications as Clinical Neuropsychology, Developmental Psychology, Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, Journal of Learning Disabilities, and so on reveals many names familiar to us as school psychologists. Yet our 5 journals include the 3 journals (Psychology in the Schools, Journal of School Psychology, School Psychology Review) believed by most to be the principal journals of the discipline of school psychology (e.g., O'Callaghan, 1974; Reynolds & Gutkin, 1982) and those 2 journals (American Psychologist, Professional Psychology) that have major impact on thought regarding the professional disciplines of psychology. It is to these journals that school psychology must look for leadership and direction through scholarly debate, empirical analysis, actuarial description, and the development of nomothetic guides to functioning as a school psychologist.

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Table 1

Frequency of Publications in School Psychology Journals in 16 Content Categories

	1974 N=163			1975 N=122			1976 N=166			1977 N=156			1978 N=175			1979 N=201			1980 N=187			
	N[a]	RO[b]	%[c]	N	RO	%	N	RO	%	N	RO	%	N	RO	%	N	RO	%	N	RO	%	TOTAL
1. Practice	14	5	9	15	2	9	9	9	5	7	9.5	4	24	2	14	16	6	8	20	3.5	11	105
2. Professional preparation	10	8	7	7	8.5	6	6	11.5	4	6	10.5	4	6	12	3	5	11.5	2	8	9	4	48
3. Professional identity	30	1	18	8	7	5	10	8	6	13	3	8	16	4.5	9	19	4	9	10	7.5	5	106
4. Ethical & legal	12	6	7	9	5.5	1	1	14.5	1	12	4.5	7	9	7.5	5	4	13	2	10	7.5	5	57
5. Early education	0	16	0	1	16	1	1	14.5	1	3	14	2	2	14.5	1	2	14	1	1	15	1	10
6. Compensatory education																						
a. Early	4	13.5	2	3	12.5	2	0	16	0	0	16	0	1	16	1	1	15.5	4	0	16	0	9
b. Later	0			0			0			0			0			0			0			
7. Instrument development & validation	20	2	12	22	1	18	29	1	17	37	1	24	28	1	16	45	1	22	46	1	25	227
8. Assessment & referral	5	12	3	3	12.5	2	11	6	1	12	4.5	8	8	10	5	23	3	11	30	2	16	92
9. Research issues	4	13.5	2	2	15	2	2	13	1	1	15	1	2	14.5	1	1	15.5	4	2	15	1	14
10. Current Ed. issues	7	10	4	3	12.5	2	24	2	4	8	7.5	5	22	3	13	18	5	9	20	3.5	11	102
11. Clinical-Personality	11	7	7	9	5.5	7	11	6	7	5	13	3	9	7.5	5	8	9.5	4	3	13	2	56

Table 1 (contd)

	N	RO	%	N	RO	%	N	RO	%	N	RO	%	N	RO	%	N	RO	%	N	RO	%	TOTAL
12. Special Ed. Exceptional child.	3	15	2	3	12.5	2	19	3.5	11	6	10.5	4	5	13	3	10	8	5	4	11.5	2	50
13. Classroom organ. and management	15	4	9	6	10	5	19	3.5	11	20	2	13	16	4.5	9	25	2	12	11	6	6	112
14. Social-educational																						
a. Classroom ecology	4			10			6			2			9			2			11			
		9	6		3.5	10		10	4		7.5	5		6	6		11.5	2		5	6	63
b. Special group problems	5			2			1			6			2			3			1			
15. Instructional issues	10									3									1			
a. Teaching in schools	1			1			1			1			1			1			1			
b. Paraprofessionals	1	3	10	2	3.5	10	1	6	7	1	6	6	0	10	5	1	9.5	4	0	11.5	2	66
c. Learning theory and instructional methods	5			9			9			2			7			6			2			
16. Higher mental processes	6	11	4	7	8.5	6	6	11.5	4	7	9.5	4	8	10	5	11	7	5	7	10	4	52

[a] Number of articles

[b] Rank order

[c] Percent of total number of articles

Table 2

Rank Order Correlations of Categories for Each Pair of Years

	'67-'69[a]	'70-'73[a]	'74	'75	'76	'77	'78	'79	'80
'63-'66[a]	.84	.53	.49	.56	.51	.30	.47	.53	.29
'67-'69[a]		.74	.49	.70	.49	.30	.50	.45	.37
'70-'73[a]			.50	.60	.72	.54	.58	.70	.37
'74				.79	.40	.54	.76	.54	.50
'75					.44	.47	.67	.33	.26
'76						.54	.65	.82	.66
'77							.73	.78	.79
'78								.69	.82
'79									.77
'80									

[a] From O'Callaghan (1974). Individual years were not reported.